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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002660

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SUBJECT: AFGHAN ELECTIONS SNAPSHOT: THE NUMBERS AND THE INSTITUTIONS

REF: KABUL 2638

Classified By: PolCouns Annie Pforzheimer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. At 47.8 percent of results announced on August 31, Hamid Karzai leads with 45.9 percent of valid votes and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah has 33.3 percent. Post projections, based on informal extrapolation from currently available data, have Karzai finishing at 49.5 percent and Abdullah at 28.9 percent, with a number of variables that constitute a wide -- and crucial -- margin of error. A possibility of a first round victory does exist. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) are under increased pressure from candidates and the public to release results and process fraud claims in a transparent, credible and swift manner. In the past day they have taken steps to enhance their transparency. Post will continue to support these institutions through our statements, our engagement with key leaders and the international community, and logistical support for field investigations. End Summary.

The Numbers

12. (SBU) With 47.8 percent of polling station results announced as of August 31, Karzai has 1,317,121 votes (45.9 percent) with Abdullah at 954,256 votes (33.3 percent). The 2,869,562 million valid votes counted so far suggest a nationwide vote count of approximately 5.6 million votes. This total is lower than the 7.1 million who voted for president in 2004 and the 5.8 million who voted in parliamentary elections in 2005. Since there is no voter registration list, we cannot measure voter turnout in traditional ways.

13. (C) Post developed a model that extrapolates from currently available data to achieve a forecast of the outcome. As of August 31, the model forecasts Karzai to finish with 49.5 percent of the vote, Abdullah with 28.9 percent, and other candidates sharing 22 percent of the vote. Crucial variables that will affect these numbers include the actual number of polling stations active on election day (between 27,064 and 26,200), fluctuations in turnout within provinces, and ballots invalidated by the IEC and ECC. A first round victory is possible. The next tranche of results is scheduled to be announced at 1700 Kabul time on September 2; we anticipate the IEC will announce the cumulative results of 60-65 percent of polling centers.

The Institutions and How to Best Support Them

14. (C) The IEC has quarantined some 300 Tamper-Evident Bags (TEBs) during the counting process, 250 of which are expected to be very problematic. Each TEB represents a polling center with four to seven polling stations. If nullified, post estimates these 250 TEBs could represent 250,000 to 375,000 votes depending on turnout levels (or 4 to 6.25 percent of 5.8 million votes), based on a range of 200-300 voters per

polling site.

¶15. (C) Integrity and effectiveness of the institutions is vital to whether or not Afghans (and the international community) deem these elections credible. This is particularly true as fraud claims increasingly dominate the media space. There are several vulnerabilities that must be confronted. The IEC is widely believed to be under Karzai's control, since he appointed its board, while the ECC is dominated by expatriate staff and vulnerable to accusations of foreign domination. There has been public frustration over the IEC's perceived sluggishness in releasing results, especially now that the IEC is no longer on target to release nationwide uncertified results on September 3 (September 7 or 8 is more likely.) The ECC's investigation period may also take longer than planned, given they have 567 "Category A" complaints. Abdullah may try to place blame on the IEC, and Karzai may do the same to the ECC. Finally, political forces at play at the IEC may try to overrule the work of the technical fraud experts.

¶16. (C) However, there have been some promising developments in recent days. Retrieval of TEBs from the provinces is 98 percent complete. The counting process is making headway, under the watch of observers. Through the UNDP's urging, the IEC has taken steps toward better transparency, including explaining the process by which it sets aside questionable TEBs (in a press release on September 1), and releasing the final list and location of polling centers, also on September 1 -- which has been one of Abdullah's priority demands (ref A). At the last donors stakeholders meeting, both the IEC

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and ECC reported good levels of cooperation with one another in investigating fraud. For example, the IEC and ECC have joint teams visiting the provincial centers where they detected a high degree of fraud, including Paktika, Ghazni, Kandahar, and Khost. The ECC has a press conference scheduled for 1500 on September 2 where it is expected to shed more light on complaints and investigations.

¶17. (C) Post will continue to support the IEC publicly and through private meetings with IEC staff, encouraging key leaders to join our public message to "let the process work." Post will continue to provide logistical support to ECC for field investigations including through U.S. PRTs. Further, we will ensure the ECC knows they have international support in the event they need to make a controversial announcement. We will continue to call on Afghan political figures to let the process play through and not to interfere.
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